

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A freestanding cover for a tray, said tray having a tray lip defining a tray opening, said freestanding cover comprising in combination:

5 a flange section;

a support section for supporting said cover on a shelf independently of said tray, such that at least part of said flange section is positioned above said tray opening; and

a retainer section for engaging said shelf.

10 2. The cover of claim 1, wherein said flange section is supported such that it blocks at least a portion of said tray opening so as to restrict evaporation of liquid from previously cooked food portions when said previously cooked food portions are contained in said tray.

15 3. The cover of claim 2, wherein said flange section has a flange surface, and wherein said support section is able to support said flange surface in a position substantially flush with said tray lip.

20 4. The cover of claim 3, wherein said flange section has a raised section extending upwardly from said flange surface, said raised section defining an upper space above said flange surface.

5. The covered tray of claim 4, wherein said flange surface encircles said raised section.

6. The cover of claim 4, wherein said cover has an uppermost surface defined by at least one protrusion formed in said raised section.

7. The cover of claim 1, wherein said support section defines a receiving space for receiving said tray.

8. The cover of claim 7, wherein said support section defines a front opening through which said tray can be inserted into said receiving space.

9. The cover of claim 8, wherein said support section defines a rear opening through which said tray can be inserted into said receiving space, said rear opening being opposite said front opening.

10. The cover of claim 9, wherein said support section comprises a left sidewall and a right sidewall, said left and right sidewalls defining said receiving space therebetween.

11. The cover of claim 10, wherein said support section comprises a left bent section connected to said flange section and a right bent section connected to said flange section.

12. The cover of claim 11, wherein said left sidewall extends downwardly from said left bent section to terminate at a left terminal edge and said right sidewall extends downwardly from said right bent section to terminate at a right terminal edge.

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13. The cover of claim 12, wherein at least a portion of said left terminal edge and at least a portion of said right terminal edge together a supporting edge for supporting said cover on said shelf.

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14. The cover of claim 13, wherein said left sidewall defines a left front retaining tab extending below said supporting edge, and said right sidewall defines a right front retaining tab extending below said supporting edge.

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15. The cover of claim 14, wherein said left sidewall defines a left rear retaining tab extending below said supporting edge, and said right sidewall defines a right rear retaining tab extending below said supporting edge.

16. The cover of claim 1, wherein said retainer section comprises a front retainer for engaging said shelf to prevent said cover from moving backwards.

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17. The cover of claim 16, wherein said shelf has a front edge, said front retainer being able to engage said front edge to prevent said cover from moving backwards.

18. The cover of claim 17, wherein said front retainer comprises at least one tab.

19. The cover of claim 18, wherein said front retainer is defined by a pair of tabs.

5 20. The cover of claim 19, wherein said tabs are integral to said support section.

21. The cover of claim 20, wherein a portion of said support section can be flexed to disengage said tabs from said front edge.

10 22. The cover of claim 17, wherein said shelf has a rear edge, and wherein said retainer comprises a rear retainer for engaging said rear edge to prevent said cover from moving forwards.

23. The cover of claim 22, wherein said rear retainer comprises at least one tab.

15 24. The cover of claim 23, wherein said rear retainer is defined by a pair of tabs.

25. The cover of claim 24, wherein said tabs are integral to said support section.

20 26. The cover of claim 25, wherein a portion of said support section can be flexed to disengage said tabs from said rear edge.

27. A covered tray for holding previously cooked food portions in a ready to use condition, said covered tray comprising in combination:

a tray for containing said previously cooked food portions, said tray having tray sidewalls and a tray lip defining a tray opening;

5 a freestanding cover having a flange section and a support section, said support section supporting said cover independently of said tray, such that at least part of said flange section positioned above said tray opening.

10 28. The covered tray of claim 27, wherein said flange section blocks at least a portion of said tray opening so as to restrict evaporation of liquid from previously cooked food portions when said previously cooked food portions are contained in said tray.

29. The covered tray of claim 28, wherein said flange section has a flange surface, said flange surface being substantially flush with said tray lip.

15 30. The covered tray of claim 29, wherein said flange section has a raised section extending upwardly from said flange surface, said raised section defining an upper space above said tray opening.

20 31. The covered tray of claim 30, wherein said flange surface encircles said raised section.

32. The covered tray of claim 30, wherein said cover has an uppermost surface defined by at least one protrusion formed in said raised section.

33. The covered tray of claim 27, wherein said support section defines a front opening for removing said tray.

34. The covered tray of claim 33, wherein said support section defines a rear opening for removing said tray, said rear opening being opposite said front opening.

35. The covered tray of claim 34, wherein said support section comprises a left sidewall and a right sidewall, said left and right sidewalls defining a receiving space therebetween, said receiving space extending between said front opening and said rear opening, said tray being positioned in said receiving space.

36. The covered tray of claim 35, wherein said support section comprises a left bent section connected to said flange section and a right bent section connected to said flange section.

37. The covered tray of claim 36, wherein said left sidewall extends downwardly from said left bent section to terminate at a left terminal edge and said right sidewall extends downwardly from said right bent section to terminate at a right terminal edge.

38. The covered tray of claim 37, wherein at least a portion of said left terminal edge and at least a portion of said right terminal edge together define a supporting edge for supporting said cover on a shelf.

5 39. The covered tray of claim 38, wherein said left sidewall defines a left front retaining tab extending below said supporting edge, and said right sidewall defines a right front retaining tab extending below said supporting edge.

10 40. The covered tray of claim 39, wherein said left sidewall defines a left rear retaining tab extending below said supporting edge, and said right sidewall defines a right rear retaining tab extending below said supporting edge.

15 41. The covered tray of claim 27, wherein said cover has a front retainer for engaging a shelf supporting said cover to prevent said cover from moving backwards.

42. The covered tray of claim 41, wherein said shelf has a front edge, said front retainer being able to engage said front edge to prevent said cover from moving backwards.

20 43. The covered tray of claim 42, wherein said front retainer comprises at least one tab.

44. The covered tray of claim 43 wherein said front retainer is defined by a pair of tabs.

45. The covered tray of claim 43, wherein said tabs are integral to said support
5 section.

46. The covered tray of claim 45, wherein a portion of said support section can be flexed to disengage said tabs from said front edge.

10 47. The covered tray of claim 40, wherein said shelf has a rear edge, said cover further comprising a rear retainer for engaging said rear edge to prevent said cover from moving forwards.

15 48. The covered tray of claim 47, wherein said rear retainer comprises at least one tab.

49. The covered tray of claim 48, wherein said rear retainer is defined by a pair of tabs.

20 50. The covered tray of claim 49, wherein said tabs are integral to said support section.

51. The covered tray of claim 50, wherein a portion of said support section can be flexed to disengage said tabs from said rear edge.

52. A food warming apparatus for maintaining previously cooked food portions
5 in a ready to use condition, said food warming apparatus comprising in combination:

a cabinet having a heated compartment therein and further having at least an open front side providing access to said heated compartment, said heated compartment having an upper compartment surface and a lower compartment surface; and

10 a covered tray disposed in said heated compartment, said covered tray comprising:

a tray for holding said previously cooked food portions, said tray having a tray lip defining a tray opening, and

15 a freestanding cover having a flange section and a support section, said support section supporting said cover independently of said tray, such that at least a portion of said flange section is positioned above said tray opening.

53. The food warming apparatus of claim 52, wherein said flange section blocks at least a portion of said tray opening so as to restrict evaporation of liquid from said previously cooked food portions when said previously cooked food items are held in said
20 tray.

54. The food warming apparatus of claim 53, wherein said flange section has a flange surface, said flange surface being substantially flush with said tray lip.

55. The food warming apparatus of claim 54, wherein said flange section has a raised section extending upwardly from said flange surface, said raised section defining an upper space above said flange surface.

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56. The food warming apparatus of claim 55, wherein said flange surface encircles said raised section.

57. The food warming apparatus of claim 55, wherein said flange section has an uppermost surface defined by at least one protrusion formed in said raised section, said at least one protrusion contacting said upper compartment surface.

58. The food warming apparatus of claim 52, wherein said support section comprises a left sidewall and a right sidewall, said left and right sidewalls defining a receiving space therebetween.

59. The food warming apparatus of claim 58, wherein said support section comprises a left bent section connected to said flange section and a right bent section connected to said flange section.

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60. The food warming apparatus of claim 59, wherein said left sidewall extends downwardly from said left bent section to terminate at a left terminal edge and said right

sidewall extends downwardly from said right bent section to terminate at a right terminal edge.

61. The food warming apparatus of claim 60, further comprising a shelf mounted
5 in said cabinet, wherein at least a portion of said left terminal edge and at least a portion of said right terminal edge together define a supporting edge for supporting said cover on said shelf.

62. The food warming apparatus of claim 61, wherein said left sidewall defines a
10 left front retaining tab extending below said supporting edge, and said right sidewall defines a right front retaining tab extending below said supporting edge.

63. The food warming apparatus of claim 62, wherein said left sidewall defines a
15 left rear retaining tab extending below said supporting edge, and said right sidewall defines a right rear retaining tab extending below said supporting edge.

64. The food warming apparatus of claim 52, further comprising a shelf mounted
in said cabinet, said shelf having a front edge and a rear edge, and wherein said cover has a retainer engaging said shelf.

20 65. The food warming apparatus of claim 64, wherein said retainer comprises a front retainer and a rear retainer, said front retainer engaging said front edge to prevent

said cover from moving backwards and said rear retainer engaging said rear edge to prevent said cover from moving forwards.

66. The food warming apparatus of claim 65, wherein said front retainer
5 comprises at least one front tab, and said rear retainer comprises at least one rear tab.

67. The food warming apparatus of claim 65, wherein said front retainer is defined by a pair of front tabs, and said rear retainer is defined by a pair of rear tabs.

10 68. The food warming apparatus of claim 67, wherein said front tabs and said rear tabs are integral to said support section.

15 69. The food warming apparatus of claim 68, wherein a first portion of said support section can be flexed to disengage said front tabs from said front edge, and a second portion can be flexed to disengage said rear tabs from said rear edge.

20 70. A method for maintaining previously cooked food portions in a ready to use condition in a food warming apparatus comprising a cabinet having a heated compartment which has an upper compartment surface and a lower compartment surface, said method comprising the steps of:

placing said previously cooked food portions in a tray, said tray having a tray lip defining a tray opening; and

inserting said tray into a receiving space defined by a freestanding cover, said cover being disposed in said heated compartment, said cover having a flange section and a support section extending downwardly from said flange section, said support section substantially defining said receiving space, at least a portion of said flange section being
5 positioned above said receiving space.

71. The method of claim 70, further comprising the step of:

positioning said tray in said receiving space such that said flange section blocks said tray opening to restrict evaporation of liquid from said previously cooked food
10 portions.

72. The method of claim 71, wherein said flange section has a flange surface, and wherein said step of positioning said tray in said receiving space includes the step of positioning said tray lip to be substantially flush with said flange surface.
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73. The method of claim 70, wherein said cover defines a front opening providing access to said receiving space, and wherein said step of inserting said tray into said receiving space includes the step of inserting said tray into said receiving space through said front opening.
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74. The method of claim 73, wherein said cover defines a rear opening providing access to said receiving space, and wherein said step of inserting said tray into said

receiving space includes the step of inserting said tray into said receiving space through said rear opening.

75. The method of claim 73, further comprising the step of removing said tray
5 from said receiving space through said front opening.

76. The method of claim 74, further comprising the step of removing said tray from said receiving space through said rear opening.

10 77. The method of claim 70, further comprising the step of inserting said cover into said compartment.

15 78. The method of claim 77, further comprising a shelf mounted in said cabinet, wherein said support section includes a supporting edge for supporting said cover on said shelf, and wherein said step of inserting said cover into said compartment includes the of step of placing said supporting edge on said shelf.

20 79. The method of claim 78, wherein said cover has an uppermost cover surface, and wherein said step of inserting said cover into said compartment includes the step of fitting said cover into said compartment so that said uppermost cover surface contacts said upper compartment surface.

80. The method of claim 70, wherein said cover has a front retainer, further comprising the step of said front retainer engaging said shelf.

81. The method of claim 80, wherein said cover has a rear retainer, further
5 comprising the step of said rear retainer engaging said shelf.

82. The method of claim 80, further comprising the step of removing said cover from said compartment.

10 83. The method of claim 82, further comprising the step of disengaging said front retainer from said shelf.

84. The method of claim 83, wherein said front retainer is defined by a pair of tabs integral to said support section, wherein said step of disengaging said front retainer
15 from said shelf includes the step of flexing a portion of said support section.